

VZCZCXRO2874
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3184/01 3441734
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 101734Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5691
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003184

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DECEMBER 8 BOMBINGS TAKE THEIR TOLL, BUT IMPACT
LIMITED

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3179
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3174
[1](#)C. STATE 125727

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: The four car bomb blasts that hit Baghdad December 8 bore the hallmarks of a coordinated terrorist attack. The intended targets of two of the bombs, which may have detonated prematurely, remain unclear. Contrary to press reports, the Ministry of Labor was not directly targeted or seriously damaged, although a bank building housing Ministry of Finance operations was hit. Casualty figures in the media are probably inflated as the U.S. military and Embassy Health Attache have so far confirmed less than 100 fatalities, although the numbers may rise. Investigations into the bombings continue and available information is limited and subject to revision. While the December 8 bombings will undoubtedly put the government, and PM Maliki personally, on the defensive and could lead to internal shake-ups, government stability does not appear to be at serious risk. Periodic large-scale attacks in the capital carry high symbolic value, but have not yet significantly disrupted the everyday lives of most Iraqis, as the overall security situation continues to see modest improvements. END SUMMARY.

FOUR BOMB BLASTS

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Investigations into the December 8 bombings continue and available information is still limited and subject to revision. As of COB December 10, Post understands that on December 8, four vehicle bombs exploded in central Baghdad within a one-hour period. All appear to have been suicide attacks; initial evidence and the timing of the attacks indicate that all four car bombs were part of a coordinated operation. Media reports have estimated the number of dead at 112, with many more injured. However, as of this afternoon, the U.S. military confirmed only 50 deaths, although this number will likely increase as more casualty figures are confirmed. Embassy Health Attache reports that hospital admissions and bed counts so far yield 63 killed and up to 479 injured.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) It appears that the first bomb detonated around 10:00 a.m. in the vicinity of a security checkpoint near a vocational and technical school. The intended target is unknown; evidence suggests that the bomb may have exploded prematurely. The second bombing hit a bank building housing Ministry of Finance operations. The bomb was reportedly transported in an ambulance.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) The third car bomb detonated in the middle of an intersection below a highway overpass. Contrary to some press reports, the vehicle did not/not explode near the Ministry of Labor. (NOTE: A Labor Ministry contact reported that the building, which is a mile away from the detonation site, suffered only a few broken windows and the collapse of

some internal ceilings from the resulting shock blast. END NOTE.) The intended target of this bomb is also unknown; the al-Nida Mosque is the only noteworthy structure in the immediate vicinity of the blast. The fourth and final bomb, reportedly transported in a van, exploded at a courthouse in the Karkh neighborhood. According to Baghdad PRT, while the building remains in use by the Ministry of Justice and includes offices providing services used by large numbers of people daily (including notary public and child welfare services), the Karkh appellate courts formerly housed in the facility relocated to a new building in June 2008.

A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

15. (C) To be sure, these attacks, like the large-scale bombings on August 19 and October 25, have generated large amounts of negative publicity for the GOI and have wounded the "law and order" credentials of PM Maliki. Still, the overall security trend in Iraq is positive, and government -- and politics -- continue to function in the face of the attacks.

16. (C) Despite Maliki's public call yesterday for Iraqis to show "solidarity" after the bombings and his warning against "divisions among the Iraqi people and among political forces," the blame game has already started. Maliki's lengthy appearance today before the Council of Representatives (COR) (septel), likely to be followed by the Interior and Defense Ministers, and last night's dismissal of the head of the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC), General Aboud Qanbar, are visible signs that the government is under

BAGHDAD 00003184 002 OF 002

stress. (Note: The BOC reports to the PM's office and routinely tasks Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) forces within Baghdad. Contacts report that the MOD and MOI are awaiting written verification of a change in Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) leadership. End Note.) At a lunch at the Embassy on December 9, Deputy Minister of Interior Adnan al-Asadi, a Da'wa Party loyalist, told the DCM that Qanbar had been removed "to please the politicians; what else can we do?" He stated that the move would likely not lead to any major operational changes at the BOC, although he asserted that GOI investigative efforts to detect terrorist networks would be redoubled.

17. (C) Outside of Baghdad, with the notable exception of Ninewa, the overall security situation in Iraq has been relatively quiet in recent months; several provinces have seen drops in violence. According to the MOI, fewer civilians were killed during the month of November as a result of war-related violence than in any other month since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The heavily populated Shia areas in the south of the country, where a large chunk of PM Maliki's potential voter support base resides, have been particularly calm. The Baghdad bombings, while of high symbolic value, appear to have little direct impact on the day-to-day lives of most Iraqis.

18. (S/NF) Iraqi government institutions have proven more resilient than many had believed. However, more regular large-scale bombings, or a marked and prolonged deterioration in security conditions outside the capital, could change the current equation. Similar attacks are possible in the near future as core al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) cells remain. Maliki's opponents stand ready to seize opportunities to discredit him and pre-election campaigning will likely make the political atmosphere nastier.

HILL